

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, TH

SUBJECT: LABOR STRIFE

REF: BANGKOK 1880

1. SUMMARY: THAILAND IS EXPERIENCING ANOTHER ROUND OF LABOR STRIFE AS DOCKWORKERS, GUNNY BAG WEAVERS, CEMENT FACTORY EMPLOYEES, AND TIN MINERS DEMAND HIGHER WAGES, FRINGE BENEFITS AND INCREASED COST OF LIVING ALLOWANCES. ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT UNUSUAL TO HAVE SEVERAL STRIKES IN PROGRESS AT ONE TIME, THE LARGE NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES AND THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF EACH ACTIVITY HAS RESULTED IN HEAVY MEDIA COVERAGE, AND WIDESPREAD CONCERN. WHILE ALL THE DISPUTES WILL BE SETTLED ON ECONOMIC ISSUES EACH HAS AN ADDED DIMENSION.

2. ONE GROUP OF BANGKOK'S DOCKWORKERS WALKED OFF THE JOB TUESDAY MORNING DEMANDING A THIRTY-THREE PERCENT WAGE HIKE TO 100 BAHT PER DAY. AFTER AN EARLY CONFRONTATION BETWEEN TWO REIVAL UNIONS, AMONG SIX THAT REPRESENT VARIOUS BANGKOK DOCK EMPLOYEES, THE NON-STRIKING GROUP AGREED TO SUPPORT THE STRIKE. THE UNIONS AND THEIR FEUDING LEADERS HAVE CREATED A SITUATION WHERE THE PORT AUTHORITY HAS REACHED AGREEMENT WITH ONE GROUP ONLY TO BE CONFRONTED WITH ESCALATING DEMANDS BY MORE STRIDENT RIVAL GROUPS, EACH UNION LEADER HOPES TO CLAIM CREDIT FOR A LUCRATIVE SETTLEMENT TO USE IN HIS BATTLE AGAINST PREDATOR DOCK UNIONS ANXIOUS TO SIGN UP A LARGER MEMBERSHIP. RIOT POLICE ARE STANDING BY

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AT THE DOCK TO AVOID VIOLENCE WHILE THE RTG LABOR DEPARTMENT ATTEMPTS TO RESUME NEGOTIATIONS.

3. EMPLOYEES AT THREE COMPANIES OF THE SIAM CEMENT GROUP WENT ON STRIKE ON MONDAY DEMANDING A 450 BAHT PER MONTH INCREASE IN THEIR COST OF LIVING ALLOWANCE, WAGE INCREASE AVERAGING TEN PERCENT AND A GREATLY EXPANDED HEALTH CARE PACKAGE. SIAM CEMENT IS ONE OF THAILAND'S LARGEST PRIVATE EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYING OVER FIVE THOUSAND PEOPLE. AFTER FAILING TO REACH A NEGOTIATED AGREEMENT MANAGEMENT TOOK THE OFFENSIVE IN A WELL-ORCHESTRATED ATTEMPT TO BREAK THE STRIKE. ADVERTISEMENTS EXPLAINING THE COMPANY'S OFFERS TO EMPLOYEE DEMANDS AND POINTING OUT THE FACT THE FIRM LOST 69 MILLION BAHG LAST YEAR APPEARED IN SEVERAL NEWSPAPERS ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE STRIKE. THE SECOND DAY ANOTHER ADVERTISEMENT APPEARED ASKING ALL EMPLOYEES WHO WISHED TO RETURN TO WORK TO COMPLETE THE COUPON AND MAIL IT TO MANAGEMENT. WEDNESDAY A THIRD ADVERTISEMENT ADVISED THE PUBLIC ONLY A MINORITY OF THE EMPLOYEES SUPPORT THE STRIKE AND IN FACT NINE OUT OF FOURTEEN LOCATIONS WERE CONTINUING OPERATIONS. IN A BID TO END THE STRIKE DEPUTY MINISTER OF INTERIOR BUNLOET LOETPRICHA HAS ORDERED THE LABOR RELATIONS COMMITTEE, ESTABLISHED UNDER THE LABOR RELATIONS ACT OF 1975, TO ARBITRATE. IF INVOKED THIS WOULD BE THE FIRST TIME THE MANDATORY ARBITRATION PROVISIONS OF THE ACT HAVE BEEN INVOKED AND WOULD PROVIDE A STABILIZING PRECEDENT.

4. FOR SEVERAL WEEKS WORKERS AT THE GUNNY BAG FACTORY IN NONTHABURI HAVE PROTESTED A GOVERNMENT PLAN TO SELL THE MONEY LOSINGSTATE ENTERPRISE TO PRIVATE BUSINESSMEN. WORKERS HAVE CLAIMED MANAGEMENT WAS INTENTIONALLY RUNNING THE PLANT INTO THE GROUND IN ORDER TO DRIVE THE SALE PRICE DOWN. TUESDAY ABOUT ONE THOUSAND EMPLOYEES CAME TO BANGKOK TO PROTEST THE PROPOSED SALE AND DEMAND THE DISMISSAL OF THE PLANT'S MANGER. MINISTER OF INDUSTRY SURIN THEPKANCHANA TOLD THE WORKERS TO RETURN TO WORK. SURIN CONTENTED IF THE PLANT COULD NOT SHOW A PROFIT IN THE FUTURE IT WOULD BE CLOSED. IN LIGHT OF THE DEPRESSED MARKET FORGUNNY BBAGS AND THE INEFFICIENCY OF THAI STATE ENTERPRISE A PROFITABLE FUTURE SEEMS UNLIKELY.. THERE IS A SECOND STRIKE AT A PRIVATELY OWNED GUNNY BAG PLANT IN KHORAT. SEVERAL THOUSAND EMPLOYEES HAVE BARRICADED THEMSELVES INSIDE THE PLANT DEMANDING INCREASED WAGES AND FRINGE BENEFITS.

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5. THE STRIKE OF TIN MINERS NEAR PHUKET, IN PROGRESS FOR SEVERAL WEEKS, TOOK A NEW TWIST WHEN MINERS ATTEMPTED TO SEIZE THREE DREDGES LYING AT ANCHOR OFF THE COAST. POLICE REPELLED THE BOARDERS, AND BOTH SIDES RETURNED TO HURLING ACCUSATIONS AT EACH OTHER. MANAGEMENT CLAIMS LABOR HAS NOT FOLLOWED THE TERMS OF A ONE YEAR AGREEMENT WORKED OUT LAST OCTOBER AND LABOR CONTINUES TO CHARGE MANAGEMENT WITH ROUGHING UP EMPLOYEES (REFTEL. MEANWHILE ILLEGAL MINING CONTINUES ON CONCESSIONS AWARDED TO TEMCO'S SUCCESSOR BILLITON AND THE THREE STRUCK COMAPNIES. WHITEHOUSE

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